Magical Realism and the Problem of Self-Identity as Seen in three Postcolonial Novels

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Abstract
Among the challenges faced by postcolonial African literature are the presumptions and naïveté of Westerners. The Western reader typically assumes Africans have nothing to write about outside their feelings about Westerners. As much as Africa is shaped by independence and neocolonialism, identity cannot be understood purely as a reaction to Euro American influences any more than by viewing literature produced in contemporary Africa in a vacuum. Rather, much of contemporary African literature seeks to conceptualize identity as an observation of tradition with a vision to the future: identity is formed neither by reminiscing about a Romantic past nor by decontextualizing the past. Many African texts abstract the difficulty of asserting non-colonial identity while overcoming colonial history with the use of magical realism. This paper offers a theoretical and historical background associating the conventions of magical realism with postcolonial texts before providing a close reading of three post-war African novels, Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-wine Drinkard* (1953), Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* (1974) and K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (2013). These novels each deploy magic realism as a way to abstract a project of self-making that appreciates a history of colonialism yet seeks to break free from external identifiers. Through magic realism, these novels demonstrate African literature's interest in self-making and provide a case for a self-constructed African identity that acknowledges and departs from the continent's colonized history.

Keywords: African literature, magical realism, postcolonialism, self-identity